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Use of Force - Real Life Demands Real Training

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She ability to lawfully use force against the public is a major factor that distinguishes security, police and corrections personnel from the remainder of society. Use of force is a responsibility, not a privilege, and as a result, the use of force by these sectors comes under scrutiny. However, the current trends in use of force training generally do not prepare officers for operational reality. The aim of this article is to stimulate thought and discussion amongst instructors, training providers and officers.

Total Training

There are three aspects integral to force responses to real violence:

- What officers would **like** to do – based on an ‘idea’ of what they can do, often influenced by media representation depicting unrealistic techniques better suited to movie fight scenes
- What officers **must** do – focused on specific operational parameters, including policies, job role mandates, and so on, and forming the baseline for the development of training
- What officers **will** do – actual responses to real violence, based on several factors, including training, experience and their ability to operate under stress

The key responsibility of instructors is to prepare officers to survive violent confrontations, taking into account physical, legal and emotional safety. In other words, it is necessary to engage in ‘total training’, to give the officer all the requisite skills and knowledge they require to do the job, and then prepare them for the reality of operational use of force situations.

The three components of total training are as follows:

1. *Theory* = knowledge acquisition or when/why to use force. Officers must understand clearly their operational parameters, as they do not want to be uncertain during a violent confrontation
2. *Practical* = skill acquisition or how to use force. This covers the fundamental technique skills and tactics, and is generally conducted under controlled static conditions so officers have a chance to learn the basic operational skill sets in a safe manner
3. *Stress Inoculation* = reality acquisition, or what force is used under stress. It is a critical aspect to prepare officers properly for the reality of violent confrontations. It includes dynamic drills, role plays, tactical scenarios, and the use of stress-related training equipment such as

protective suits, non-lethal training munitions, and bio-feedback tools

The third aspect unites the various skill sets together in an operational context and, more importantly, it allows an officer to self-assess and to be assessed as to how they react and perform under simulated realism. This aspect is not a ‘would like to do’ option, it is a ‘must do’ responsibility for the safety of officers. Yet it is the training element most commonly left out of UOF (use of force) training programs.

Stress Learning

So why is stress inoculation so critical for UOF training? The answer is simple; because interpersonal violence is possibly the most stressful situation human beings can face. How humans operate under stress is the key to preparing officers to survive violent encounters. Understanding the human nervous system is central to understanding how people react under stress.

The human nervous system (NS) comprises two key sections – the central NS and peripheral NS.

The peripheral NS has two parts – the somatic NS (those functions people have control over) and the autonomic NS (those functions that are automatically regulated by the body). The autonomic NS has two further divisions – the parasympathetic NS (calms the body), and the sympathetic NS (arouses the body). During violent encounters, it is the sympathetic NS that is responsible for the effects of stress.

The central NS is comprised of the spinal cord and the brain, which in turn has three key areas:

- *Forebrain* – the ‘human’ brain (responsible for rational and logical thought)
- *Midbrain* – the ‘mammalian’ brain (performs extensive reflexive processes)
- *Hindbrain* – the lower part of the brainstem (takes care of heart rate and respiration)

It is the midbrain that is so important under stress. The midbrain has no philosophy, no hesitation, and no regret. It knows only death and life, and nothing in between. Its job is to enable survival. It is poor at multitasking. It acts decisively and only does one thing at a time. Unfortunately, the midbrain is ignored in many training philosophies. Too much training is conducted ‘in the abstract’, which is where all training must begin, because the forebrain is the entry point for all information. When learning, information is processed in the forebrain. Unhappily, that is where most training also ends.

As officers are gradually immersed in the training environment, stress levels must be increased so that important psychomotor skills begin to filter into the midbrain. Under stress, it is the midbrain that takes over. The idea of stress inoculation training is to transfer training from the ‘thinking’ forebrain to the ‘reflexive’ midbrain, thus improving officers’ reflexive responses and making them more natural and comfortable under stress. The midbrain will only know what to do if the student has been stress inoculated.

Dynamic Training

Developing confidence in training should be the primary goal of instructors. Confidence is a mindset based upon past experiences and observations. Creating confidence in survival skills is a two-step process – developing skill confidence and developing situational confidence.

The experience factor is often the most overlooked aspect of survival training. All too often, survival training never leaves the static environment. Officers may learn the mechanics of a skill but they never learn how the skill will interact in an open environment. Understanding the bond between confidence, experience and stress levels is an important concept for instructors. Anxiety is common when an officer perceives a lack of control. Anxiety continues to increase when the situational demands escalate and the time needed to manage the situation decreases. Therefore, training exercises must decrease anxiety and increase situational confidence.

The methodology for reducing survival stress should revolve around four goals:

1. Increase officers’ skill confidence at a subconscious level quickly
2. Increase officers’ situational confidence through dynamic training exercises
3. Mentally prepare officers for potential threat stimulus and correct responses
4. Train officers in breath control to control heart rate when anxiety arises

Developing situational confidence is a matter of applying a technique to the dynamics of a field application. This process uses stimulus-response training principles and allows the student to explore how a technique will function outside the static classroom setting. When stimulus-response training principles are designed and monitored correctly, an officer’s reaction and response times are drastically reduced. Reducing reaction and response time is one of the most important functions of survival response training.

Unfortunately, many instructors never move beyond simple static practice. Although static practice allows officers to develop basic neural motor programs, it will not trigger the motor program when exposed to spontaneous threat.

The following factors should be considered when designing dynamic training exercises:

- The exercise should have clear objectives that relate to operational reality
- The role players should be committed to making the exercise a learning experience, not a test of ego
- After each exercise, officers should receive simple, clear and adequate feedback
- Officers should never be allowed to 'die' in training (they should not be given 'free passes' either)

Training programs should combine what officers must do with what they actually will do under the stress of actual confrontation. Officers should develop 'natural' responses based on sound biomechanical and tactical principles, and they should be encouraged to adapt the concepts to suit their own personal capability. The technical aspects of programs must be based on gross motor skills, which offer important advantages of less instruction time, reduced refresher time and high retention level, and are more likely to be performed during times of high stress.

The process for properly learning use of force is as follows:

1. Learn – knowledge/skill acquisition phase
2. Practice – hone skills to familiarize the body to responses (train the midbrain)
3. Master – unconscious competence (autopilot)
4. Functionalize – place in operational context (stress inoculation)
5. Maintain – regular, appropriate, realistic training

Each stage is progressive and necessary for the next, and only by adequately working the various stages in a natural, progressive manner will officers absorb, adapt and fully utilize the training. Constantly refreshing skill acquisition does little to prepare officers for the reality of violent encounters. Proficiency and confidence are products of realistic, appropriate and regular training.

Competency Obligations

It is a common mistake for instructors to set training expectations at a level that suits them, rather than to what is appropriate for the officers. The training has to be accessible to all officers,

not just those who can easily adapt to the learning process. For training to be useful, it must be aimed at the level of the average officer.

There are four levels of mastery:

1. *Unconscious Incompetence* – the lowest level. People do not know they are bad at something and usually refuse to admit it. The first step in making them better is to get them to admit that they need experience and practice
2. *Conscious Incompetence* – this is where people know they are bad at something but will not admit it. The instructor's first task is to educate them of their ignorance. Officers who know they need to learn, and are willing to listen, are easier to train because they are already at a level of conscious incompetence
3. *Conscious Competence* – this is where people do the right thing, but they have to think about it. The training at this stage is programmed into the forebrain. This is fine for many tasks, but for force response skills in violent confrontations under stress, it is not good enough
4. *Unconscious Competence* – the highest level of mastery. The aim is to 'learn it until you forget it', to perform without thinking so that officers will operate on autopilot under stress, responding correctly without hesitation or conscious thought of their skills. It involves repetitive training under realistic conditions, to program skills into the midbrain

Ultimately, to prepare officers properly for reality, the aim of instructors is to get them to level three as soon as possible. However, the instructor cannot do this alone. Officers have to make a commitment to their own development and survivability.

The obligation of a UOF instructor is simple: prepare officers to survive violent confrontations. This can be expressed as three key factors – safety, survivability, consequence. A critical aspect of this obligation involves assessing competence. Consider the following:

- If officers have good physical skills, but do not understand operational or legal parameters regarding when and how they may use these skills, they are not yet competent, as they do not possess the complete range of required skills
- If officers understand the legal and procedural aspects, but their physical skills are not up to the required standard, they are not yet competent as, again, they are missing an essential part of the required content
- If officers have competent knowledge and good physical skills, but fall apart under stress, are

instructors not remiss in their duty of care to that officer, other officers, and the public, if they certify the officer to lawfully use force?

What if an officer demonstrates an unwillingness, or inability, to use force in training? An officer who is uncertain whether they can use force against another person (intermediate or deadly), and for whatever reason, should probably not be working in an operational role that has the likelihood of placing them in a violent confrontation. To do so would be to put not only that officer in danger, but also any other persons who may be directly or indirectly involved in the confrontation.

What if an officer demonstrates a callous nature during training, disregarding safety guidelines or taking no responsibility for the consequences of their actions? It is not a simple issue, but one that needs to be considered and addressed by all professional UOF instructors, training providers and employing organizations.

Summary

The greatest danger to officer safety is complacency. As humans, the desire to survive is instinctive, but the ability to survive is learned, and learning requires motivation.

Remember, the right to lawfully use force is a responsibility, and that starts with the instructors who provide officers with the knowledge and skills for surviving violent confrontations, where their safety and the safety of others is dependant on this training. Further, instructors, training providers and employers should consider this obligation legally, in terms of vicarious liability (being held responsible for the actions of someone else without doing the act yourself) and efficacious liability (an obligation to produce the desired result, where the 'buyer' is entitled to get that which they reasonably expect).

The task focus is to provide officers with the most effective methods of surviving violence, giving them all the tools to enable them to do their job safely and effectively. The key factor in assessing this capability lies in providing realistic training based on sound principles and methodologies. ■

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